

Ex 6:1 to 9:35 Torah Reading (Parshat Va-Era)
English version to be sung to the Torah tropes by Len Fellman
Latest version January 12, 2021

6:2 And spoke *Elohim* to Moses, saying to him, “I am YHWH.
3 [And I appeared] [to Abraham], to Isaac, and to Jacob, as *El Shaddai*. By my name YHWH I was not known, [to them].
4 I also established by covenant [with them], to give to them, the land of Canaan,
[that land]—the land of their pilgrimage, where they sojourned upon it.
5 And furthermore, I Myself [have surely heard] the groaning of the children of Israel, with which *Mitsrayim* is enslaving them,
and I have remembered My covenant.
6 [Because they are enslaved], [and because we made a covenant], you must say [to the children of Israel], “[I am] YHWH.
[I will] [bring you out] from beneath the burdens of Egypt, and rescue you from their slavery.
I will redeem you with an outstretched hand and with judgments of great power.
7 I will take you for me as a people, and I will be for you as a God, [and you will know]
[that indeed] I am YHWH your God, [who brings you] out from beneath the burdens of Egypt.
8 I will bring you into the land [about which] I raised my hand swearing [to bestow it]
on Abraham, on Isaac, and on Jacob. [I will] give [it to you] as an inheritance. I am YHWH.”
9 [Thus spoke] Moses, [relating these words] to the children of Israel.
But they would not listen to Moses, from a shortage of *ruah* and from servitude that was severe.
10 Then spoke YHWH to Moses, saying,
11 “[You must go in] and speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that he may send the children of Israel, [out of his land].”
12 Then spoke Moses before YHWH, saying, “Even [the children of Israel] won’t listen to me.
So how will I be heard by Pharaoh? And I am of uncircumcised lips! (*i.e.* I don’t talk so good).
13 Then spoke YHWH to Moses and to Aaron, [and commanded them] [regarding the children] of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt,
[end aliyah] to bring out *B’nei Yisrael*, from the land of Egypt.

6:14 These were the heads [of their fathers' houses]: the sons of Reuben, first-born of Israel, Enoch and Pallu, Chetron and Carmi. These were the families of Reuben.

15 The sons of Simeon: Yemuel, Yamin and Ohad, Yakhin and Tzochar and Saul, [son of the Canaanite woman]. These were the sons of Simeon.

16 Now these were the names [of the sons of Levi] by their generations: Gershon, Kehat, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were seven [and thirty] and a hundred years.

17 The sons of Gershon: Livni and Shim'i, [by their generations].

18 The sons of Kehat: Amram and Yithar, Hebron and Uzziel. The years of the life of Kehat [were three] [and thirty] and a hundred years.

19 The sons of Merari were Machli and Mushi. These were the clans of Levi, by their generations.

20 Then took Amram Yokhebed his aunt for himself as a wife. She bore to him Aaron and Moses. The years of the life of Amram: [were seven] [and thirty]: and one hundred years.

21 And the sons of Yitzhar: Korach and Nefeg and Zikhri.

22 The sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Eltzafan and Sithri.

23 And took Aaron Elisheva [daughter of Aminadav], sister of Nachshon, to himself as a wife. She bore [to him] Nadav and Avihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

24 The sons of Korach: Assir and Elkana, and Aviasaf. These were the families of the Korachites.

25 Eleazar son of Aaron [took to himself] [one of the daughters] of Putiel for a wife. She bore to him: Pinchas. [These were the leaders]—[being the heads] of the fathers of the Levites, by their families.

26 This was the Aaron and Moses, of whom said YHWH [to them], “[You must bring out] *B'nei Yisrael* from the land of Egypt, by their armies.”

27 [They are the ones] who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to take the children of Israel out of Egypt. It was *this* Moses and Aaron.

28 [And so it was], on the day [on which spoke] YHWH [end aliyah] to Moses in the land of Egypt.

29 [On that day God spoke]—YHWH said to Moses these words, “I *am* YHWH: [you must relate] to Pharaoh king of Egypt everything—all that I do say to you.”

30 Then spoke Moses before YHWH, “[Seeing as how] I am of uncircumcised lips, [why therefore] would he hearken to me—Pharaoh?”

7:1 Then said YHWH to Moses, “[Know for a fact]: I put you as a god to Pharaoh. And Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.

2 You are to speak all that I command you, and Aaron your brother will relate it to Pharaoh so that he will send the children of Israel from his land.

3 I will harden Pharaoh’s heart. [I will perform many] [wonders and signs] [and do marvels] in the land of Egypt.

4 But he will not [heed you]—Pharaoh. I will send forth my hand. [I will bring out] my legions:

My people [B’nei Yisrael] from the land of Egypt, with judgments of great power.

5 [Then they will know]—Egypt—that I am YHWH, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt, and I bring out B’nei Yisrael from their midst.”

6 Thus did Moses and Aaron, just as [it was commanded] [by YHWH] [to them]: that is what they did.

7 Now Moses was of age eighty years, while Aaron was of age three and eighty years [end aliyah] when they spoke to Pharaoh.

8 Then spoke YHWH to Moses and to Aaron, saying:

9 [When it happens] that he speaks [to you]—if Pharaoh [should say to you], ‘Prove yourselves—[perform a miracle]’, [say this to Aaron]:

‘[Go and pick up], [take hold of, your staff]—throw it down before Pharaoh, it will become a snake.’

10 So they went—Moses and Aaron—to Pharaoh, and they did just as they were ordered by YHWH,

so threw down Aaron [his staff to the ground] right [in front of Pharaoh] and in front of his servants, and it became a snake. *chartummim*: magicians

11 Then called in Pharaoh: his wise men and sorcerers, that they might do also—the *chartum* [mim of Egypt] [with their incantations]—the same.

12 [And they threw down]—each one his staff, and they became snakes. But swallowed up by the staff of Aaron, [were their staffs].

13 Yet strong-willed was the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not hearken to them, just as YHWH had spoken.

14 Then said YHWH to Moses, “[Heavy* indeed] is Pharaoh’s heart. He refuses to send out the people. *See discussion in Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’

15 [You must go]: [and pay a call to Pharaoh] [in the morning]. [When you see] [him going out] to the water,

you will stand there to meet him at the bank of the Nile. [And the staff] that was changed into a snake, you must take in your hand.

16 You will [say this to him]: ‘YHWH the God of the Hebrews has sent me [to you], to say

“Send out my people [that they may serve me] in the wilderness,” but I see that you have not heeded me thus far.

17 Thus says YHWH, “By this you will know that indeed, I am YHWH.

‘Watch and see’: [I’m about to strike] with the staff [that is in my hand] [upon the waters] that are in the Nile, and they’ll turn into blood.

7:18 [You will see that the fish] [that are in the Nile] will die, and putrid will be the river.

[They will be loathe]—the Egyptians—to drink water from the river.’ ”

19 And said YHWH to Moses, “[You are to tell Aaron this]: ‘Pick up your staff, [and stretch out your hand] over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their canals, [over their pools], [and also over] wherever is collected water,—[it will turn into blood].

[Their will be] blood in the whole land of Egypt: in the trees and in the stones!’ ”

20 [Thus did they do], Moses and Aaron, [just as it had been] commanded [by YHWH]. [Moses raised up] his staff, [and he struck] the waters that were in the Nile, in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his officials, [and changed indeed] were all the water in the Nile, into blood.

21 And the fish in the Nile did die, and they polluted the river, so unable were the Egyptians to drink the water from the Nile.

[There was blood] in the whole land of Egypt.

22 [But when they did the same]—the magicians of Egypt with their spells,

it hardened Pharaoh’s heart [so he would not listen] to them [just as it had been] predicted by YHWH.

23 [So he turned away]—Pharaoh—and went back to his palace. He set not his heart, [even on this].

24 [And they dug all around]—[all the Egyptians]—on the banks of the Nile, for water to drink, since they were not able to drink from the water in the river.

25 [It stayed like this] for seven days, after stricken by YHWH was the Nile.

26 Then said YHWH to Moses, go to Pharaoh and say [this to him]: Thus has spoken YHWH: “Send free my people, [that they may serve me].

27 And if you refuse [to let them go], then this [is what I will do]: [I will strike] [all of your territories] with frogs.

28 [Then will swarm] [the Nile river] with frogs. [They’ll go up] and come into your house, into the room that you sleep in, and into your bed; into the house of your servants [and among your people], into your ovens [and into your kneading bowls].

29 Upon you and your people, [and all of your servants] [there will come up] the frogs.”

8:1 [Then spoke] YHWH to Moses, “Tell this to Aaron: Reach out your hand with your staff [over the rivers], over the canals and over the pools, and bring up the frogs, on the land of Egypt.”

2 [Thus held out] Aaron his hand over the waters of Egypt. Then came up the frogs, and they covered the land of Egypt.

3 But they did the same—the magicians—with their enchantments: They brought up the frogs, [upon Eretz Mitsrayim].

8:4 Then summoned Pharaoh Moses and Aaron, and he said, “Plead with YHWH, that He may remove the frogs from me [and from my subjects], and I shall send the people free, and they will sacrifice to YHWH.”

*See Orlinsky,
NOTES ON THE NEW
TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH

5 Then spoke Moses to Pharaoh, “[Have this triumph over me:]”
[You tell me the time] that I should [intercede for you], for your servants, and for your people,
to cut off the frogs from you and from your houses, so that only in the river will they remain.”

6 Pharaoh answered, “Do it tomorrow.”

[Responded Moses], “According to your word, so that you will know [end aliyah] [that there is none] like YHWH our God.

7 Then shall depart [the frogs from you]—both from you and from your houses, from your servants, and from your people.
[Only in the river] will they remain.

8 Then [departed Moses] and Aaron from the presence of Pharaoh.

[And cried out] Moses to YHWH on account of the frogs, He had set upon Pharaoh.

9 Then carried out YHWH the word of Moses, and there died the frogs in the houses, in the courtyards, and in the fields.

10 They piled them up, heaps upon heaps, and it stank throughout the land.

11 When it was seen [by Pharaoh] that there had been relief, he made stubborn his heart, and would not listen to them,
[just as it had] been foretold by YHWH.

12 Then spoke YHWH to Moses: Speak thus to Aaron, that he hold out his staff, and strike the dust of the land.

It will become like lice throughout *Eretz Mitsrayim*.

13 [And they did so]. [He stretched out his hand]—Aaron took his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth,
and there were vermin* both on man and on beast. All [the dust of the earth] turned into lice, throughout *Eretz Mitsrayim*.

14 [But they did the same]—the magicians—[with their enchantments], to bring forth the lice, [but they could not do so].
There were vermin* both on man and on beast.

*See Orlinsky,
NOTES ON THE NEW
TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH

15 Then said the magicians to Pharaoh, “The finger of God it is.”

But strong-willed [was Pharaoh’s heart], [and he would not listen] [to them], [just as it had] been foretold by YHWH.

8:16 And said YHWH to Moses, “Early in the morning, stand before Pharaoh. [When you see him] go out to the water, say [this to him]: ‘Thus says YHWH, (Send forth My people, [that they may serve Me].

17 Indeed, [if you should fail] [to sent out] My people, [this is what will happen]: ‘I will send upon you, [upon your officials], [as well as your subjects], [and upon your homes]: [swarms of insects].

‘Filled will be the houses of Egypt with swarms of insects, and even the ground on which they stand.

18 [I will set apart] on that day, the region of Goshen, of which there, My people dwells within it, so that there will not be *there* any insects. Then you will know—in truth you will see—[end aliyah] that I am YHWH in the midst of the land.

19 I shall make a distinction between My people and [your people]. On the morrow will appear the sign that I speak of.’ ”

20 And that is what YHWH did: there came insects [in a heavy swarm], into the house of Pharaoh, and the houses of his officials, [and throughout the land], [all of *Eretz Mitsrayim*]. Ruined was the country, in the face of the swarm.

21 Being summoned by Pharaoh, [there appeared Moses] and Aaron, [and he said to them], “[You may go now]: sacrifice to your God, [here in *this* land].”

22 Replied [Moses to him], “It is not proper for us [to do so], because offensive to the Egyptians is our sacrifice to YHWH our God. [Could we sacrifice] [what is offensive] [to the Egyptians] [before their eyes], and will they not stone us?

23 [A journey] of three days we must make into the desert. We will sacrifice to YHWH our God, just as He instructed us.”

24 To this, [Pharaoh replied], “[I will let you go]: I [will send you off] [that you may sacrifice] to YHWH your God in the wilderness, [if only it be] a distance not too great, that you go. [Plead also] for me.”

25 To this [Moses said], “The moment that I take leave of you, I will pray to YHWH, to turn away [the insect swarm], [that they will leave Pharaoh], his officials and his subjects, on the morrow. [But only hear this]: No longer may Pharaoh [play false with us] by refusing to send off out people to offer sacrifice to YHWH.”

26 Then went out Moses from the presence of Pharaoh, and he prayed to YHWH.

27 And did YHWH [what was asked for] by Moses. Turned away [was the insect swarm]: from Pharaoh, his officials and his subjects. [There did not remain], even one.

28 But hardened in Pharaoh was his heart, also this time. He would not send off the people.

9:1 Then said YHWH to Mōses, “Go to Pharaoh. You [must say this to him]: ‘Thus says YHWH the God of the Hēbrews, “Send forth My people [that they may serve Me].”

2 [For indeed], if you should refuse [to send them free], and you continue to hold on to them,

3 know that the hand of YHWH [will fall upon] your livestock that is in the field,

on the horses and the donkeys and the camels, the cattle and sheep, a pestilence—a severe one indeed.

4 Then will distinguish YHWH between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt.

And [nothing will die] of all that belongs to the children of Israel—[not one thing].’ ”

5 Fixed by YHWH was the time, as He said: “[Tomorrow is the day] [that will be carried out] [by YHWH], this action in the land.”

6 And so did YHWH [this very] thing, [on that next day]. [And they all died]—all the livestock of Egypt.

But of the livestock of *B’nei Yisrael*, there perished not one.

7 [He sent men], and Pharaoh [found out the truth]: [there did not die], of the livestock of Israel, even one.

But hardened was the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not set free the people.

8 Then spoke YHWH to Moses and to Aaron, “Take for yourselves fistfuls of soot from a furnace,

[and toss it up]—[have Moses throw it] heavenward, in the eyes of Pharaoh.

9 It will spread [like fine dust] over the whole land of Egypt.

It will fall upon man [and upon beast] as boils, [breaking out] in sores in all *Eretz Mitsrayim*.

10 [And so they took] some ashes [from the furnace], and they stood before Pharaoh. [And he hurled it]—[the ashes were thrown] by Moses into the sky. [And sure enough], boils causing blisters [were breaking out] on man and on beast.

11 [They were not able]—the sorcerers—[to come and stand] before Moses, because of the boils:

indeed there were boils on the magicians [and on all of Egypt].

12 But hardened by YHWH was the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not hearken to them, [just as it was] told by YHWH to Moses.

13 Then said YHWH to Mōses, “Early in the morning, [go and stand], confronting Pharaoh,

and [say to him this]: ‘Thus says YHWH the God of the Hēbrews, send free My people [that they may serve Me].’ ”

9:14 [For indeed], [this time [here's what I'll do]: I am sending all of My scourges [right at your heart], at your officials and your subjects, so that you will know [that in fact] there is none like Me in all the earth.

15 Because by now, [I could have] [put out My hand] and struck [both you yourself] and your subjects with pestilence, [and you would have been swept] from the earth.

16 Nevertheless, [for this] purpose [I have raised you up]: in order to show you My power, [and so it should be] [end aliyah] that they tell of My name [in all the world].

17 And still [you set yourself] [over My people], by not setting them free.

18 Behold: [I will cause to rain down] at this time tomorrow, a hailstorm—a heavy one indeed, [regarding which] [there has been nothing] [like it] in Egypt from the day of its founding until now.

19 [And so now], [you should find] refuge for your cattle, [and in fact] for all that is yours in the field. Every man and beast that are found [in the field] [that have not been] gathered indoors, [there will come down] [upon all of them] the hail, and they will die.' ”

20 [Whoever had awe] for the word of YHWH of the servants of Pharaoh [hurried to bring] his slave and his livestock indoors.

21 But whoever [did not set] his heart on the word of YHWH, [that one left] his slaves and his livestock in the field.

22 Then said YHWH to Moses, “Stretch out your hand to the heavens, that there may be hail in the whole land of *Mitsrayim*, upon man [and upon beast], [as well as upon] all that grows in the fields, in *Eretz Mitsrayim*.”

23 [So he stretched it out]: Moses [pointed his staff] [to the heavens], [and YHWH] [poured out] thunder and hail, [and there darted lightning] to the ground. [And there were showers]—[from YHWH]—of hail, over *Eretz Mitsrayim*.

24 So there was hail, [and lightning] flashing in the midst of the hail, heavy indeed, [of which it may be said]: [there had been] [nothing like it] in all *Eretz Mitsrayim* since the time it became a nation.

25 And thus struck the hail throughout *Eretz Mitsrayim*—[it struck all] [that was in the field], from man to beast. Also all that grows in the field was struck by the hail; even trees of the field were shattered.

26 Only in the region of Goshen—because there dwelt the children of Israel—there was no hail.

9:27 So again [Pharaoh sent word], calling for Moses and Aaron, and he said to them, “I stand guilty [this time].
YHWH is righteous, while I and my people are wicked.

28 Plead to YHWH: [since enough it is], [this coming forth] of the thunder of God, and of hail.

I will send you free; you must not continue to stay.”

29 [And replied] [to him], Moses: “[When I have gone] from the city, I will spread out my hands unto YHWH.

The thunder [will then surely stop], and the hail will be no more, so that you will know that to YHWH belongs the earth.

30 As for you and your servants, [surely I do know] [that in fact] you still have no fear before YHWH *Elohim*.”

31 Now, the flax and the barley were stricken: for the barley was “in ears” (*i.e.* ripe), and the flax was in bud.

32 But the wheat and the spelt [were *not*] stricken, [because late crops] were they.

33 And so went out Moses, going from Pharaoh, [outside the city], and spread his hands out to YHWH.

And there ceased both the thunder and the hail, and the rain stopped falling to the ground.

34 [When he saw this]—Pharaoh—that it stopped: [all of the rain] [as well as the hail]

and the thunder, he continued to offend. He hardened his heart, both himself and his officials.

35 Strong-willed was the heart of Pharaoh: he did not set free *B'nei Yisrael*,

[just as it had been] [end aliyah] predicted by YHWH [by the hand of Moses].

Len Fellman's English readings with tropes

The purpose of this project is to translate *THE SONG OF THE TORAH* into English.

I work by comparing as many as ten English translations of a *pasuk* and creating a cantillated English sentence that sounds as much as possible like the Hebrew. They follow the Hebrew as closely as possible, word for word and trope by trope. The English language has an amazing flexibility, making it possible to make the English word order match that of the Hebrew quite well, allowing for some “poetic licence”, and some willingness on the part of the listener to be “carried” by the melody more than by the English syntax. The translation needs to sound good when *chanted*, but not necessarily when *spoken or read*.

Unlike most translations, these “transtropilations” are not intended to be a substitute for the Hebrew. On the contrary, they are meant to provide a “window” into the Hebrew text and its musical expression. My ideal listener knows enough Hebrew and has enough interest to follow the Hebrew in a bilingual text while the *leyner* is chanting the English version, to bring the Hebrew text to life, both *verbally* and *musically*. For this purpose I use *exactly* the same tropes in the English as in the Hebrew (almost always on the corresponding English word).

The texts can be used to do **consecutive translation**, i.e. leyning a phrase in Hebrew, followed by the corresponding phrase sung in English. Some of my recordings demonstrate this. I do this frequently when leyning for groups that either know little Hebrew, or that don't have a *chumash* in front of them.

I favor literal translations (e.g. “cut a covenant”) to call attention to Hebrew idioms, and towards simpler (even if less accurate) words (e.g. Ex. 12:7 “beam above the door” rather than “lintel”) to be easier to follow. If my readings provoke a discussion of the Hebrew, I consider that as justification for using less-than-idiomatic English. I try to find just the right balance between “literalness” and “listenable-ness”. A primary goal is throwing light on the Hebrew syntax.

In order to adapt the trope symbols to a left-to-right language like English, I *reversed* the direction of the trope symbols:

mercha tipcha munach tevir mapakh *or* yetiv kadma *or* pashta geresh gershayim telisha katana telisha gedola

(Generally speaking the *conjunctive tropes* such as mercha, munach, mapakh, kadma, and telisha katana “lean toward” the words they “conjoin” to, while the *disjunctive tropes* such as tipcha, geresh, gershayim, and telisha gedola “lean away” from the words that follow, so as to create a sense of separation.)

The trope symbol is normally placed under the accented syllable, unless it is a *pre-positive* accent (telisha gedola, placed *at the beginning* of the word or phrase) or a *post-positive* one (telisha katana or pashta, placed at the *end* of the word or phrase).

The Hebrew text frequently puts a *makkeph* (which is like a hyphen) between words in order to treat them as a single word to be chanted. I use a different system for English: If an entire English phrase is to be chanted to a single trope melody, I place it between grey brackets, as in this phrase from the Book of Lamentations:

[clings to her skirts]

The *leyner* is invited to fit this phrase to the *Eicha* “rivi'i” melody in whatever way seems most natural.

As a variant of the “grey bracket” device, I indicate pairs of tropes by “wrapping them around” the phrase which have the combined melody:

| | | |
|------------------|--|--------------------------|
| mercha/tipcha | kadma/geresh (<i>or</i> : azla, etc.) | mercha siluk |
| (Renew our days) | (She weeps bitterly). | (a fire-offering to God) |

Again, the *leyner* should decide on the most natural way to fit the phrase to the combined trope melody.

I put words in gray which I consider essential but which don’t strictly match the Hebrew. I also “pad” some phrases with extra words in gray to fill out a musical phrase nicely. Different trope systems vary widely in the length of the musical phrase used, so the words in gray may or not be used depending on the *leyner*’s cantillation system. In particular, the tropes *telisha g’dola* (ר), *legarmeh*, *metigah-zakef*, and *pazer* vary widely in the musical phrases used for chanting. (And please indulge me in my whimsical treatments of *shalshelet*.)

“*Metigah-zakef*” is a special trope combination which can be recognized by a kadma and a zakef katon appearing on the same Hebrew word (again, a *makkeph* makes two words into one). (There are several examples in Genesis 18 & 19, beginning with 18:16). I indicate this by placing the corresponding English phrase in grey brackets:

[Take heed—take care for yourself]

In some trope systems (viz. cantor Moshe Haschel in “Navigating the Bible II”) this is given a distinctive melody—I add extra syllables to fill out the musical phrase (as in “take care” in this example). Haschel’s system also chants the trope *munach* as *legarmeh* more often than other systems do.

I don’t write a single word of translation without first hearing the melody of the phrase in my mind, following one of two trope systems: The one by Portnoy and Wolff (*The Art of Cantillation*) or the one by Joshua R. Jacobson (*Chanting the Hebrew Bible*).

I transcribe the name יהוה as YHWH (in small caps). I almost always chant this as *yud-hey-vav-hey*, which I have discovered fits marvelously into several of the trope melodies. But of course the *leyner* can choose to pronounce it as “*God*” or “*Adonai*”.

Warning on the Hebrew text: The text I use for the English trope system is from Aryeh Kaplan; the Hebrew text I display is from Wikisource. Occasionally (but rarely) a phrase will use different tropes in the two systems.

The English translations I mostly use (besides several scholarly commentaries) are the following:

Aryeh Kaplan, ‘The Living Torah’ (1981) (also my source for proper names & transliterations)
Richard Elliott Friedman, ‘The Bible With Sources Revealed’ (2003)
Everett Fox, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (1997)
The Stone Edition ‘Tanach’ (1996)
JPS ‘Hebrew-English Tanach’, (2nd Ed. 2000), *along with* Orlinsky, ‘Notes on the New Translation of the Torah’ (1969)
Robert Alter, ‘The Five Books of Moses’ (2004)
Commentaries in the ‘Anchor Bible’ series
Rotherham, The Emphasized Bible (1902)
The Jerusalem Bible (1966) (also my source for topic headings)
The New King James Bible (1982)